

The Changing Dynamics of Indo-Nepal Relationship after the Rise of Modi

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Abstract

This research article examines the turbulence in the bilateral relationship between Nepal and India, following Modi's rise to power. Nepal and India not only share a common geography, but they also have cultural proximity. Common religious and cultural practices have helped them develop close ties for centuries. Moreover, Indo-Nepal's political relationship, as well as socio-cultural and civilizational ties, has been hugely significant between the two countries. The leaders of both nations contributed to each other's political transition in several periods of history. However, there has been an increase in unanticipated tension in the bilateral affairs between the two neighbours after the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Indian political arena. This article examines events by adopting the theoretical lens of realism. In fact, Prime Minister Modi appears to have been indifferent to India's Neighbourhood First Policy, Nepal's complete sovereignty, and the shared cooperation with Nepal, which has triggered the long-standing border dispute, which has deteriorated the Indo-Nepal relationship.

Keywords: *Xenophobic nationality, border dispute, anarchical system, hegemonic approach, sovereignty.*

INTRODUCTION

India and Nepal share closeness in multiple ways, but have identical differences as sovereign nations. Since 2014, with the advent of Modi in the Indian political sphere, the differences have widened instead of narrowing, which manifests the true self-interest nature of a state and its leader. As Heywood explicitly discusses in his book, *Global Politics*, the interstate relationship is unstable because it depends on the self-interest of leaders. Heywood writes, "As essentially self-interested actors, the ultimate concern of each state is for survival, which thereby becomes the priority of its leader." In his discussion, the final concern of a leader is the state's self-interest. Although leaders' selections are for the well-being of people, Indo-Nepal bilateral ties also continue as per the interests of the leaders of the respective nations. The BJP's emergence in India and the leadership of Modi would have weakened the relationship with Nepal in comparison to the geopolitical scenario of prior decades. A large section of people from Nepal seems to have been unhappy with India, particularly due to two unexpected actions from India's side: the first one is the undeclared economic border blockade imposed by India in 2015. The next notable event is the publication of a political map by India in 2019, which includes Nepali territory. These aggressive strategic moves of India have proven that Nepalese diplomacy appears too weak to put an agenda to amend previous treaties with India. Additionally, Nepal has also expressed its dissatisfaction as well as anti-Indian feelings in a multitude of ways. In Nepal, the common people, along with public figures, do not

positively receive India's actions, as a neighbouring country is supposed to do. Thus, border disputes and the unofficially announced economic blockade became the ground to give rise to suspicion as the stepping stone in the dynamics of Indo-Nepal ties in India's era of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Few studies have examined how the bilateral relationship between India and Nepal has changed since 2014 under the leadership of Narendra Modi and the BJP even though the two countries have a shared history, culture, and geographic proximity. Few studies critically analyze how India's recent political assertiveness--such as the 2015 economic blockade and the 2019 political map controversy--has changed Nepal's perceptions of India. The majority of the literature currently in publication highlights long-standing treaties, customary diplomatic exchanges, and cultural ties. Additionally, in the post-2014 geopolitical context, the Indo-Nepal case has hardly ever been systematically examined through the theoretical lens of interstate relations being rooted in leaders' self-interest, despite the claims of scholars such as Heywood. This creates a void in our knowledge of how nationalism, strategic self-interest, and leadership interact to shape the development of modern Indo-Nepal relations. This study is important for several reasons. By applying Heywood's theory of state self-interest to a case study of South Asia, it first advances the field of international relations scholarship by adding empirical support to theoretical discussions. Secondly, it offers a nuanced understanding of the ways in which nationalist politics and domestic

leadership styles impact smaller neighboring states like Nepal, particularly under Modi's administration. Third, the study has useful diplomatic implications since it identifies points of contention and mistrust that can guide future discussions, treaty modifications, and bilateral cooperation projects. Finally, the study highlights the agency of smaller states in opposing or allowing the strategic moves of regional powers by elevating Nepal's viewpoint in this changing dynamic.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF INDO-NEPAL BILATERAL RELATIONS

The India-Nepal relationship has historically been regarded as distinctively cordial and reciprocal because of strong civilizational, political, and cultural affinity. The Indo-Nepal friendship, the tradition of free movement of people across borders, goes back to the times of the rule of the Sakya clan and Gautama Buddha. After the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-16, the Indo-Nepal border was officially demarcated, and the Treaty of Sugauli of 4 March 1816 shaped boundaries at the Mahakali River in the western part, the Mechi in the east, including some parts of hills and Terai. In addition, as a political coalition, many educated Nepalese had participated in the Indian non-violent freedom struggle campaign in the 1920s. Leaders from both countries jointly struggled for the freedom movement in the past. Some Nepali leaders were imprisoned in the Indian emancipation movement; simultaneously, some of the Indian leaders also shared the ground with Nepali people in the freedom campaign and for the establishment of democracy in 2007 BS in Nepal. It was a significant event in the Indo-Nepal relationship because top leaders, particularly from the Nepali Congress (NC), were highly motivated and launched a movement against the Rana rule, inspired by the Indian non-violent struggle and succeeded in overthrowing the Rana regime in Nepal.

Kumar and Vikash in their article titled *Democratic Process in Nepal: A Perspective from Nepali Congress*, have mentioned a secret meeting of the Nepali Congress held in India to begin the anti-Ranas movement in Nepal. They state, "The Nepali Congress called an emergency meeting at the residence of Subrna Shumsher two days later in Calcutta and decided to launch a nationwide armed struggle in Nepal." In their reference, Nepalese political wingers were highly influenced by Indian movements for political shifts. India fundamentally seems to have played key roles in the crucial political events of Nepal as a witness in the Sugauli Treaty of 1816, the Treaty of 1950, the Tripartite Agreement between King Tribhuvan, the Nepali Congress, and the Ranas in 1951, the Twelve-Point Agreement between the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) in Delhi in 2005, and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006 respectively. Thus, such historically significant treaties appear as centuries-long, deeply rooted strategic Indo-Nepal ties that have contributed to Nepal's progress.

The Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 has been the bedrock of the diplomatic relations between Nepal and India. Since 1950, under the treaty's provision, both countries have been enjoying

cooperation in multiple ways. The treaty bestows perpetual peace and friendship between the two countries to acknowledge and respect each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence. Despite having mutually warm friendships, India sporadically has long-standing political, as well as territorial, misunderstandings with its closest neighbour, Nepal. Fundamentally, the "Neighbourhood First Policy" of India emphasizes peaceful affairs and collaborative, synergetic co-development with its neighbours for the overall well-being of all nations. "The Minister of External Affairs, Shri. V. Muraleedharan stated that the government is committed to establishing peaceful and mutually beneficial relationships with all of its neighbours . . . India's Neighbourhood First strategy aims to build regional institutions that are mutually beneficial, people-oriented and conducive to peace and prosperity." The true notion of India's Neighbourhood First Strategy is to grow peacefully along with all neighbours.

In 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party became the leading political party in India. Unfortunately, the BJP is often accused of promoting extremist, xenophobic Hindu Nationalism rather than Nationalism in such a socio-culturally and religiously diverse nation, India. "If in the past the appeal of Hindu nationalism was rooted primarily in the sphere of culture, since 2014 the BJP has ensured that in constructing a polity in its own image, the power of the state is fully utilized to both consolidate the process and marginalise its opponents." In Singh's words, mobilising the state's power, the BJP accelerates the process of marginalization for opponents of Hinduism. Hence, the rise of the BJP's Hindu-oriented nationalism and its impact have been a visible factor in exacerbating the Indo-Nepal relationship. Taking advantage of the landlocked geographical features of Nepal over several periods of history, India has shown a hegemonic attitude to Nepal through land encroachment in different regions and even imposing an undeclared economic border blockade. The contemporary scenario of India exhibits that the Prime Minister Modi-led government also has not adopted its core component of foreign policy, the Neighbourhood First Policy; instead, India has embraced a contained strategic approach in Indo-Nepal ties.

OBJECTIVES

1. To observe the Indo-Nepal relations and long-standing border disputes earlier to the emergence of the BJP in India.
2. To examine the deteriorating Indo-Nepal ties after the rise of Prime Minister Modi (BJP), based on two events: India's unofficial economic blockade and the publication of a new political map.

REVIEWS OF LITERATURE

The Indo-Nepal relationship has been implicitly disputable on fundamental grounds in the contemporary era. The border issue would be one of the crucial causes behind the unusually deteriorated friendship between the two neighbouring countries. The border of both countries has been a point of contention at various points for ages, though India

hardly accepts it. India seems to have ignored such strategically serious issues, repudiating and, technically, stating them not as a dispute but as differences. Some scholars have rigorously discussed centuries-long proximity from different angles in their research based on the obvious grounds to justify their arguments.

Ranjan, in his article entitled "The Changing Dynamics in India-Nepal Relations," reminds the implied ignorance of India on border disputes between the two countries, Nepal and India. "Although the word "disputes" is being used by many, technically, India and Nepal have "differences" and not "disputes" over the delineation of the border at Kalapani and Susta in Nawalparsai district of Nepal." In his words, India overlooks the border dispute intensity in many sections, just stating indifference. It means India deliberately has less concern regarding border disagreements. However, Nepal repeatedly expresses a sour dissatisfaction unofficially regarding border inequalities, mostly from the public, though such voices have not been marked yet at the diplomatic level.

Nepal, similarly, is often concerned about land encroachment on the border from India's side, reverently as a peace-loving nation. Nepal believes that India should be responsive to the border issues raised by Nepal because these are bilateral issues that need to be settled. As a newly emerging nation, India is much more responsible for border disputes than Nepal in the present context. Scholars DB Subedi and Bikram Timilsina, in their collaborative article entitled "Border Disputes Between India and Nepal: Will India Act as a Responsible Rising Power?" point out that India is supposed to take the initiative to address the Indo-Nepal border disagreement as the rising nation. They opine, "India and Nepal's enduring border disputes... in Nepal and alienating Nepal from India resolving the disputes through cooperative rather than coercive measures will be critical for India's ambition to become a "responsible" rising power" In their view, India could be more accountable for ending the existing border struggle between India and Nepal. India, in fact, has no alternative to be responsible regarding the border settlement, even to fulfil the ambition to be a superpower in the global arena in the days to come. But, in reality, India does not seem to emphasize the approach of cooperation with Nepal to cool off the ongoing disputes.

Furthermore, Rajeev Ranjan Chaturvedy, a critic in his article "Shoring up Maritime Security Cooperation", admits that the Modi-led government has formed a policy to restore the border-related issues, whether land or water. He states, "Modi government has adopted a new policy thrust in India's maritime neighbourhoods and if PM Modi succeeds in plugging the gap between good ideas and its implementation, India could restore its sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean." For him, India has systematically planned to reinstate its visible presence in the surrounding border areas from Land to water. Its impact can also be seen on the Indo-Nepal border. On practical grounds, "Nepal, despite being a poor economy," Nepal has resolutely continued its true neighbourhood with India, even though India does not decently follow a mutual understanding of

bilateral ties. Pant, in his article titled "Socio-Economic Impact of Undeclared Blockade of India on Nepal," argues that the overall atmosphere shows that India treats Nepal with a big brother attitude, despite having a profound sociocultural affinity. He writes:

They share not only a long and open border but also a cultural history for a long time. Nepal and India had many modes of their relations like- "Sphere of Indian Influence", "special relationship" later turned into "Equal Relationship with all", then "Big Brother role" later become "Dominating power", "Zone of Peace", "Panchayat Regime". So, despite this closeness and friendly relations they also had many irritants. After a long time, Nepal has achieved political stability, except some issues, on September 20, 2015, to adopt a constitution.

According to Pant, India has covertly ignored the civilizational proximity with Nepal, adopting a restrained strategy in recent years, which became an irritant in the relationship between the two countries. Even after announcing a proposition of a "Zone of Peace" in 1975, Nepal would not have enjoyed a truly sovereign rapport with India yet. Behind such anti-Indian sentiment, India is much more liable than Nepal in the present circumstances.

Pathak, a scholar, in his research article "Impacts of India's Transit Warfare against Nepal", claims that unexpectedly Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led government indirectly repeated the interference strategy towards Nepal, crushing sovereign equality and long-standing mutual respect. Pathak says:

Therefore, Nepal produces huge speculations, horizontally and vertically. First, the PM Modi-led government tries to keep all neighbors under its umbrella rather than pursuing sovereign equality, territorial integrity, non-intervention and aggression and mutual respect. Second, India disrespects rights of transit trade of landlocked countries, humanitarian law, human rights conventions and treaties and the World Trade Organization.

For him, the Modi-led government has tactically disregarded two internationally valued practices: one is the respect for the sovereign nation of Nepal and its rights of transit trade as a landlocked country. So, in the contemporary scenario, India has tried to patronize its neighbours, which was proven after the humiliating economic blockade on the landlocked country of Nepal. The six-month-long economic blockade by India could be the acute consequence of disrespect to Nepal.

The Prime Modi-led government would further exacerbate the disputable issues to a higher degree, to upsurge hostility rather than harmony and reciprocated balance with Nepal. The increasing excess of Nepali people on social media enables all to debate about the cold India-Nepal relationship. Two scholars, Karki and K. C., in their article entitled "Nepal-India Relations: Beyond Realist and Liberal Theoretical Prisms," claim that due to the excess of social media and change in the socio-political awareness of common people, almost all the contentious issues are on the floor. They state, "The political transformations have created a free media that brought those debates on Nepal-India relations into the public discourse." Depending on them, at the public level, Nepali citizens have openly expressed

anti-Indian sentiment on social media. In other words, deteriorating Indo-Nepal relations have spread among the citizens, who appear to express their dissatisfaction differently. So, the Indian government could not hold the expected amicable bond between the countries. The Critics, as mentioned earlier, partially agree that India and Nepal have been in conflicting relations in different phases of history due to political and territorial disputes, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) merely kept it up. However, this article argues that Modi's rise in India exacerbates tensions, leading to contentious border issues and a more pronounced hegemonic geopolitical strategy against Nepal, which has not adopted India's Neighbourhood First Policy and lacks bilateral consent, thereby failing to respect Nepal's complete sovereignty.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This article examines the Indo-Nepal ties and some occurrences precisely after 2014, the rise of the BJP in India, by adopting the theoretical lens of realism. In the domain of International Relations (IR), realism as a theoretical approach views that in an anarchic international system, a powerful country acts to influence its neighbours and impose regional dominance regarding its border issues or economic activities. Thus, realism primarily emphasizes the significant roles of power and security in the global order. Relatively, after the advent of Modi as the prime minister, India is also a powerful nation that reactivates disputable relations with Nepal, to a more intensive degree, intensifying through border disputes and an unofficial economic blockade despite its civilizational proximity.

RISE OF MODI AND INDO-NEPAL RELATIONSHIP

Modi's ascent in India exacerbates Indo-Nepal ties, escalating border disagreements despite the implementation of the border demarcation treaty of 1950. On the practical ground, Nepal shares a border with five Indian states, specifically Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Sikkim, a distance of almost 1850 kilometres. Although after the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-16, border delineation, the Treaty of Sugauli, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950, and other agreements were signed at different times for mutual understanding, there are disputes in numerous sections of the Indo-Nepal border. India would have especially fueled the border disputes encroaching on Nepal's lands in different places in recent days. Scholars Karki and K. C. state that strengthening Indo-Nepal bonding would be incomplete without correcting the land incursion in different parts of Nepal. They opine, "Any discourse on the Nepal-India relations would remain incomplete without reviewing the Indian encroachments of Nepali territory." In their observations, the border dispute is a crucial point in Indo-Nepal affairs in the present context. The emergence of the BJP in India was a positive sign in the eyes of many common people in both countries to strengthen the mutual ties, erasing the centuries-long implicit aversion between India and Nepal. However, the BJP's lead in India appears much more corrosive to Nepal than before.

In 2014, elected as the 14th Prime Minister of the newly emerging powerful country India, Modi was considered a charismatic, great leader of not only India but also the world in the 21st century. Unfortunately, people's expectations would not have been met as PM Modi had failed to address national-level concerns and strategically significant affairs via diplomacy. According to Rachman, in the eyes of left-wing critics, Modi seems to be a representative of only limited Hindu nationalists rather than a true leader of the entire communities of India. "He is often accused of being the leader of Hindu extremists and promoting xenophobic nationalism in such a hugely diverse country." For him, Modi is unable to represent the diverse communities of India. The severe impact of the Hindu extremist mindset of Modi can be seen obviously in Nepal relations, too. After Modi's leadership in India as the nation's supreme leader, the contentious act of border disputes, including a new political map, has explicitly exhibited to contain Nepal, piling up a mounting animosity rather than strengthening the amicable ties between the two countries.

India historically came across a very bitter past by experiencing British imperialism from 1858 to 1947. After the act of decolonization, India became an independent sovereign nation, but the colonized hangover can still be seen in its affairs with Nepal, with a big brother attitude. Even though Nepal is one of India's closest neighbours of India, the two nations have been unable to enjoy a true friendship. "The Indian Empire, though, never accepted the autonomy of Nepal, except in treaties and speeches. It regards Nepal as a part of Bharatbarsha. This colonial desire has emerged not only from historical forces but also from India's modern need . . ." The two neighbours have endured regional disputes in many areas for ages, overtly since the Treaty of Sugauli. In truth, several sections of the border have disputes, but Kalapani, Lipulek, Limpiyadhura, and Susta are major noticeable areas. Behind these differences, India is only responsible because there is no single piece of land invaded from Nepal's side. In other words, India has implicitly disrupted the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 and the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace of 1950 by encroaching on Nepal's lands. Thus, such factual shards of evidence show that India does not seem to have properly approached keeping the obvious essence of peace and friendship treaties, even after the ascendance of Prime Minister Modi to the Government.

The friendship agreements of India with neighbouring countries have been significant for robust bilateral affairs. India would have been hegemonic through an indirect influence on the domestic affairs of the concerned neighbours. Scholar Christian Wagner, in his article titled 'The Role of India and China in South Asia,' claims that India would not have kept the friendship agreement with its closest neighbours by involving itself in the internal affairs of respective countries. Wagner asserts, "The friendship agreements with the Himalaya kingdoms Bhutan (1949), Sikkim (1950), and Nepal (1950) gave India a great involvement in the internal affairs of its neighbours." In his view, India's influence appears in the internal sphere of Nepal along with Bhutan and

Sikkim. Scholar Deeptima Shukla, also in her article titled "India-Nepal Relations Problems and Prospects", unveils rising coldness regarding the Indo-Nepal relationship. The distinct occurrences indicate that India follows the strategic diplomacy of interference in the sovereignty of Nepal, which resulted in anti-India sentiment in public. She shows "India's indifferent attitude has led to anti-India feeling in Nepalese governments. As far as oppositions are concerned, for them, arising anti-Indian sentiments is the most effective instrument for political mobilization." In Shukla's remarks, the anti-Indian feeling of Nepal is the serious consequence of India's unresponsive assertiveness, which is highly connected to existing politics. This is also reflected in the politics of identity within a single territory where religious beliefs divide people.

This is an era of the BJP in India, including almost all of South Asia and the world. However, the bitterness between India with Nepal is apparent instead of diminishing due to border issues. Scholar Paudyal, in his article titled "Border Dispute between Nepal and India", displays recently updated occupied areas of the border record between India and Nepal along with the disagreement segments. According to a report in 2014, 26 districts of Nepal share borders with India, and 21 districts are experiencing the tension of territorial violation from India's side. He exhibits:

Of the 26 districts of Nepal sharing a border with India, 21 districts, in 54 places, are facing the problem of violation of their territory by India. It is estimated that more than 60,000. land of Nepal has been encroached by Indian side. Of this, the most disputed area is Kalapani-Limpiyadhura, where the largest chunk of land (37,000h.) has been encroached.

Based on Paudyal's factual evidence, a large portion of the border is under dispute. The report almost verifies that the Modi-led India has failed to establish understandable diplomatic relations with the landlocked country of Nepal. In reality, despite their centuries-old sociocultural and religious vicinity, it is a terrible irony that over 80% of the shared border between India and Nepal is disputed.

As the new global power, India appears to be a poor diplomat by engaging in tensions with Nepal rather than fostering friendly relations. India is a rising nation, and its pace of rise substantially depends on its relationship with Nepal. So, India should strengthen ties with Nepal constructively through dialogue instead of acting as the big brother, bestowing a hegemonic presence. Two scholars, Subedi and Timilsina, rigorously point out the latest irresponsible presence of India over Nepal "In the absence of constructive dialogue and mutually respectful foreign policy with Nepal, India will be continually seen in Nepal as a "big brother" – a reminder that India is a "rising power" but not yet a "responsible power." According to them, India often exhibits its superiority over Nepal by trespassing on Nepali territory. India's big-brother arrogance seems to be apparent in Indo-Nepal relations instead of a responsible neighbour. So, it is high time for India to adopt constructive dialogue with Nepal to strengthen the bilateral relationship in the days to come.

Modi's leadership in India would have come across as ineffective in his diplomatic approach to neighbours. Noticeably, between 1952 and 1969, India had operated almost 18 military checkpoints using Nepali lands, and later on withdrew all of them except the one in Kalapani. If we look at the overall scenario of India, the Modi government seems to revive the old conformist strategy of overconfidence by building roads on Nepal's land. Two scholars discuss the Indo-Nepal border issues relating to a newly constructed road in India in the diplomatically sensitive region. The road construction of India in Nepali territory reignited the Indo-Nepal border tension to a peak level. They write:

The border tension re-escalated on 8 May 2020 when Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated the 80-kilometre-long road to Mansarobar, a part of which is built on Nepal's land in the Lipu Lekh area. Nepal claim Kalapani belongs to Nepal as the Map prepared by the survey of India in the year 1850 and 1856 declare the origin of the Limpiyadhura is 16 km northwest of Kalapani. But the India refuse it as a proof.

According to them, in 2020, India constructed a shorter route in Nepal's land for the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra, one of the sacred destinations for Hindu devotees. This route became one of the crucial causes of antagonism between India and Nepal. Building up roads in the encroached territory would be the extremists, chauvinistic national arrogance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It incidentally specifies that Modi-led India has worsened the border disputes to a greater degree. Thus, the India-Nepal border dispute has deteriorated relatively after Prime Minister Modi came into power in India.

India's official publication of a new, updated political map in 2019, including Nepali territory, is another point of the Indo-Nepal relationship's deterioration. After the release of the map, Nepal diplomatically objects to the Indian government and demands that the map be corrected. Mainly, Nepal does not agree with the map, and Nepal's existing Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali shows deep concern about it officially by publishing a revised map in response to India. Nepal's reaction is: "After public outcry against India's aggression, on 20 May, Nepal's government published a revised political and administrative map with the Kalapani- Limpiyadhura track. This welcome step reasserts the government's commitment to protect sovereignty and territorial integrity." Official issue of a new political map from Nepal's side, comprising disputed regions such as Lipu Lekh, Limpiyadhura, and Kalapani, intensely symbolizes a diplomatic response to India. The map has turned into an issue of hostility in the Nepalese political arena, which has not officially been solved yet. Hence, even in the era of Modi, India is unable to strengthen its bilateral ties with Nepal.

Nepal's response to India is more apprehensive than pleasing due to frequent border conflicts that bring mistrust on both sides. In 2015, after territorial issues, Indian authorities made rigorous attempts to calm down the situation. India practically attempts to implement the concept of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) for a smart border with recommendations such as installing electronic equipment and determining

documents, passports, driving licenses and other electronic identity cards. People's cross-border movement can also be limited by establishing order posts. "Along with that, EPG is also set to suggest that both governments check and maintain records of people travelling to both sides and make valid identity cards mandatory. Nepal-India Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) proposed a citizen ID card for border management. Despite multiple proposed alternatives, the border dispute has not yet been resolved in a compact resolution. It means India could not be successful in pacifying the Indo-Nepal misunderstanding with a concrete point. Therefore, the Modi-led Indian government seems to have failed to address the long-standing bitterness regarding territorial issues with Nepal.

Similarly, in 2015, India imposed an unofficial economic blockade against Nepal, which appeared to slacken Indo-Nepal ties. The economic blockade became a sentimental issue for the Nepali people. It causes anti-Indian sentiment among Nepali citizens to despise the existing government of India. In response, India defends the blockade as an internal problem of Nepal, clarifying it as an expression of disagreement of the ethnic Madhesi people of Terai Nepal on the new constitution. In India's case, the economic blockade could be an avenue for the ethnic Madhesi people to fulfil their demands. Scholars Gupta and Tariq in their article entitled "India and Nepal Relations During Narendra Modi Regime", discuss the prime of both countries. India and Nepal agreed to solve the existing economic block by signing an agreement, but some Terai-based leaders were not satisfied. They write, "The agitation had affected Indo-Nepal relations. India and Nepal signed seven agreements at a summit meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepal counterpart K.P. Sharma Oli, even as leaders of the Madhesi people in Nepal threatened one more blockade." As a reference, Madhesi leaders are holding their threat for more blocked even after an agreement between India and Nepal. In reality, India has denied the allegations of the blockade, insisting that it was done by the Madhesi people of Terai, who expressed their dissatisfaction with the new constitution of Nepal. Although India repudiated the economic blockade and supply shortage of basic goods in 2015, common Nepalese people, along with leaders, are also not ready to agree with the ready-made clarification of India. Thus, the Modi government would have lost its trust in Nepal after imposing an economic blockade for more than six months in 2015.

DISCUSSION

Before India's unofficial economic embargo, the Indo-Nepal tie was at a better level of proximity. In 2014, Nepal heartily welcomed Prime Minister Modi to the Nepali parliament for the formal address, which was a sign of a strong relationship between Nepal and India. The presence of Modi in the House of Representatives was considered a historical moment to take a different height of Indo-Nepal relations because Modi was only the Prime Minister to address the Nepali parliament after I.K. Gujral. Scholars Malik and Sarwar, in their article "Nepal's Transition from Monarchy to Democracy: An Analytical Perspective of

Post-2008 Indo-Nepal Relation", mention that Prime Modi is the only Indian Prime Minister who was honoured to address the Nepal Parliament after I.K. Gujral. They state, "Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi visited Nepal and addressed to Nepali Parliament in August 2014. It was after seventeen years that any Indian prime minister made an official visit to Nepal after I.K. Gujral." Officially, Prime Minister Modi's address is after almost two decades in Nepal. Fundamentally, in his address, Prime Minister Modi focuses on the 4Cs –Cooperation, Connectivity, Culture, and Constitution- to enhance bilateral ties and avoid internal interference. It sounds much more diplomatically healthy for both sovereign nations to fortify bilateral relations in the long run. However, did Prime Minister Modi keep his promised words in the Nepali House of Representatives in 2014? The answer would not be affirmative. Thus, India has lost its trust in centuries-long ties of friendship with Nepal after the ascent of Modi to power.

The unofficial economic blockade would be a sign of India's displeasure with Nepal's newly promulgated Constitution 2015. It was made right after the promulgation of the new constitution of Nepal. So, it was not just a coincidence, rather, it could be the intense dissatisfaction of India with Nepal concerning the constitution. "In 2015, Nepal ratified a new constitution. India was undoubtedly concerned about the riots along the open border between India and Nepal. Nepal feels that India's economic blockade during that time stemmed from their own concerns over the country's constitution." As scholars, there is almost no confusion regarding India's sole concern regarding the ratified constitution of Nepal. So, India's almost six-month-long economic blockade can be taken as the consequence of India's dissatisfaction with the amended Constitution of Nepal 2015.

Nepal practically does not agree with India's casual response to the blockade as a result of internal matters. Rather, India could have unequivocally expressed its discontent with Nepal for violating the previously signed treaties between the two countries in different epochs of history. In fact, the blockade was, is and will be against the peace and friendship treaty and the sovereignty of a landlocked country, Nepal. The economic blockade is also in contradiction of the Neighbourhood First Policy of India. Thus, although India may not be ready to accept the allegation of the border blockade to Nepal in 2015, it is both a legal, moral and ethical injustice to Nepal. The issue would not merely be related to the economic aspect, but also a humanitarian crisis. Hence, this blockade incident could have been one of the most unpopular acts of the Modi-led government throughout history in the eyes of Nepal.

CONCLUSION

In India, Modi's rise to power in 2014 was a positive sign for Nepal that all the existing misunderstandings between the two nations could be resolved and the bilateral ties reinforced. The government could be one of the key factors for greater cooperation to attain better socio-economic benefits and cultural prospects in a monumental height.

However, the Modi-led government seems to assertively ignore the border disputes with Nepal rather than establish a shared mutual understanding to erase the centuries-long bitterness. It is India's weakness to devalue the sovereignty of Nepal and disregard the significance of harmony, integrity, and security balance, because it can be a just miscalculation in the days to come. To incite unrest in border areas with the peaceful sovereign nation Nepal, obviously, will not be fruitful for India as well as Nepal in the global sphere. And, India needs to adhere rigorously to the Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950. Similarly, Nepal should also put forward genuine issues through high-level diplomatic dialogue to settle down and reinforce the historical mutual bonding and bilateral ties with its closest neighbour, India. In fact, Indo-Nepal territorial disputes can become a major obstacle for both countries to rise in the anarchical system of global space in the 21st century.

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